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*A new contract agent wins his spurs
and reports with conviction that—*

TRAINING PAYS

James A. Savacool

The following are excerpts from a contract agent's report on his successful operations in a denied area. He had been arrested, to be sure, but only in the course of a mass roundup of potentially subversive elements, and his security had been so good that after about eight weeks he was released for lack of evidence. His report shows the possibility as well as the difficulty of operating under severe counterintelligence controls and above all the value of thorough training. Experienced intelligence operatives may find the lessons herein illustrated a bit elementary, but this agent is understandably sold on the value of those elementary lessons and proud of having learned them well and followed them.

I am altogether convinced that I managed to evade detection because of the thorough teaching in tradecraft I was given by my instructors, particularly Al, with his insistence on careful planning and close attention to every detail regardless of how small or inconsequential it might appear.

Meetings

Because of the close surveillance to which all persons living under the block system of neighborhood control are subject, meetings and meeting places were the problem of primary concern. Meetings just to transfer material or funds were comparatively simple; the main essential was coordinated timing. There was no telephone number that could be called for the exact time, but a local radio station gave the hour on the minute. We used this to synchronize our watches. Our unalterable rule was, "Never before the hour and never more than three minutes after the hour." If contact was not made in that interval it was deferred to an alternative time and place. In a full year of such meetings we had to resort to the alternative only two or three times.

We soon discovered that Al's advice about woo cover for status and for action was right, that it was much easier to devise a reason

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for being who and where we were and doing what we were doing if members of the opposite sex were involved. So wherever possible we arranged to have a woman as cutout, and the cover for a meeting with her would be simply a lovers' tryst. We met in bars and restaurants and, seemingly by chance, in areas normally frequented by both parties. Meetings without a cutout were held only when absolutely unavoidable, as when planning the details of a sabotage project.

When such direct contact had to be made, we generally followed this basic outline: The time and place, plus the alternate plan, were passed by the cutout. We used code words for the meeting places and a plus or minus number of hours. At the appointed hour one of the two parties would be, let's say, at a bus stop in a fairly busy section of town, with an appropriate cover for "status." The cover for action was almost invariably the other's offer to give him a ride home. Cover for their acquaintance was generally a former pupil-teacher relationship. Neither person carried documents to these meetings. Information was given orally and no notes were taken. The writing up was done immediately after the meeting when safely at home.

Staying Inconspicuous

Every effort was made to avoid both deserted sections and excessively busy areas. Al's maxim "Know the area" became a way of life. In my area, which was quite large, I knew the location of security forces, where government officials lived, and where foreigners of consequence were to be found. How important this knowledge is was impressed on me one time when I parked my car in an unfortunate spot to go to a meeting. It happened like this:

Returning to my car after the meeting, I recalled Al's reiterated "Always have a cover story." I truthfully did not believe there was any need for a cover story at this point, but just to follow the rules I prepared one. It was not a well-planned cover; certainly it could not compare with those I prepared after that. But it was a story. I knew a teacher who lived about a block from where I had parked my car. I went by his house and spent a few minutes there before going back to the parking place. As soon as I got to the car and opened the door about five spotlights went on and I was surrounded by militiamen. They searched me and the car, made me identify myself, and asked what I was doing there. Since I was prepared,

I could tell my story readily and convincingly, and it had enough truth in it to get by.

I learned later that a high government official had moved that very day into the house in front of which I had parked. Close! A good object lesson, and an extremely convincing one. Al was right: "Have a cover story at all times, for if you don't you may panic and trap yourself."

Regular Sessions

Tutoring sessions were used as a cover for regular meetings. The "pupil" was supposed to be taking English lessons from me at my house. I supplied him with books, gave him a list of things we would have covered in the last session, had him do under my supervision a paper to be handed in as homework, and gave him another list of items to be covered in the current session. He always arrived carrying several books to use in the lesson, and he would enclose in them any papers necessary for the meeting. We drew up a class schedule for twice a week and had a reason why he had not been able to attend his last class if we had not met then. If he was there off schedule he was making up a session he had missed. While our meetings were in progress I played a tape recording of English readings to give more realism to the cover and also to preclude any eavesdropping on our conversation.

This attention to detail made it possible for me to meet with one of my contacts countless times, though the block warden might be standing in front of the house watching us. Thoroughness in detail had been one of the fundamentals drilled into me by all my instructors, and in practice it paid off.

Caution with New Contact

One afternoon I received a call from my case officer asking me to come immediately to a restaurant. When I arrived he told me we were meeting a student who he believed had good potential as a political agent. The case officer was leaving the country, and I would have to handle this man on my own. He was energetic, apparently well acquainted, and anxious to do something against the government; but he needed some financial aid to continue in the university. I was to give him \$200 and explore the possibility of his working for us.

The student arrived and I was introduced to him, by a first name only. I invited him to take a walk with me and talk about his activities. He was very enthusiastic. He told me he had organized about 300 students but they needed arms. He wanted me to get him weapons, gelatin, etc. I pleaded ignorance in all such matters. Then he began asking questions. He asked me where I lived. I gave him the name of a suburb favored by Americans. He asked if I had a car. I told him no, that was one of my problems; living in the suburbs and working down town I lost quite a bit of time. He wanted to know how long I had been in the country, etc.

Then he turned to describing the "active" groups at the university. He seemed thoroughly conversant with the membership of these groups. When I inquired which one he belonged to he said he was an independent. He cooperated with several groups in sabotage undertakings, but he preferred to remain unattached; it gave him more chance to act. I just listened, carefully. I asked him where he could meet me so that I could give him the tuition money. He was very grateful for our helping him continue his studies; he would always cherish the memory of our friendship for the "little" people, the real people of his country. Could I meet him at such-and-such a corner tomorrow at 2:00 p.m.? "Of course; would you like the money in big bills or small?" "Twenties would be perfect," he said.

All the information he had elicited from me was of course false. I really don't know why I went to such pains to lie so plausibly, even adding little anecdotes about my troubles with public transportation during the rush hour. I presume it was the oft-repeated admonition of my instructors to let my contacts know as little of me as possible. The added trimmings to induce belief were probably just instinct, quickened by the knowledge that two Americans had recently been seized in the area of our rendezvous.

Provocation Deflected

The immediate problem was this prospective meeting with a person who had been handed to me as a promising contact but whom I had not checked. My solution was this: I called one of my contacts of university age and gave him an envelope containing the money. I told him that at exactly 2:00 p.m., when my new contact would be standing on a corner five miles away, he was to enter a kiosk this man's parents owned and hand them the envelope with

the son's name on it. He was then to leave immediately, taking precautions against being followed. The courier did exactly as directed and reported back that no one except the mother had been in the store.

In the meantime I had started a check on my new would-be friend, asking the head of one of the activist groups at the university to look into him. He returned mystified; my friend was unknown to anyone in his group. Was I sure of the name and school? I verified these and asked him to try again. At the same time I started another investigation through a second group. The results were the same: subject unknown; their security suspected counterintelligence.

I now alerted both groups and gave them the names of the people the man had mentioned as members. They were appalled that counterintelligence was onto these, their top echelon at the university. One of them muttered it might be a good idea if the man got in the way of a bus. I heard later that he died under mysterious circumstances; I don't know what happened to him.

A regretful postscript is that at the time of the mass arrests they picked up an American citizen, fluent in the local language, who lived in the suburb I had named, had no car, and worked down town. They interrogated him frequently and at odd hours—at lunch or supper time so he wouldn't get anything to eat, in the middle of the night, etc. My story held up all too well in the absence of identification by the dead man.

Security Behind Bars

A big headache was caching materials. My house had a tile floor, and any attempt to loosen a tile would be fatal. There is no way to conceal its looseness. At the time of the mass roundup the house was searched tile by tile; light fixtures were taken down from the ceiling; the hi-fi cabinet was taken apart and examined minutely; every piece of clothing was processed; the bathroom was torn up; even the little tank on the roof for maintaining water pressure was examined and measured. The only item they missed was a breakfast table.

This was a standard formica-top table with tubular aluminum legs. During the first search my data was hidden in one of the legs. Immediately afterward I destroyed it, but they overlooked the table again in the second search. I don't know whether they thought of

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it in later searches, for I was taken to jail immediately after the second one.

When he trained me, Al insisted that I use a safety signal rather than a danger signal. I put that system into effect with my contacts, instructing them never to approach me but just make this safe sign. One day shortly after I was sent to prison I saw one of my contacts in the yard. I suspected I was under observation and was afraid he might involve both of us by recognizing me. He followed the rule, however, and when he gave the safety signal I walked away.

I waited my chance and one day managed to sit next to him at lunch. Then I could tell him that as far as I knew I was in the clear, merely having been picked up in the mass arrests. He said his case was the same. That made it much easier to sleep at night. I cautioned him against making friends in prison and urged him to sit tight and confine his conversation, even with those he believed to be friends, to generalities. From then on we saw each other regularly in the prison yard but did not so much as exchange a wink.

Seeds of Success

The prisoners were all curious about the reasons why their fellows were in jail. In concocting an answer for them I recalled the advice I had been given, to think in case of capture about taking a lesser rap. So I began laying the groundwork for a lesser charge. I figured that if I was known to believe I had been jailed for a particular reason, the police just might tend to investigate that reason rather than another. So when asked why I was arrested I would say, "I think they are accusing me of hoarding," and explain how when they searched my house the police had found quite a bit of soap and probably thought I was black-marketing that scarce item. I took good care not to mention any specific amount of soap; I didn't want to make the case against me too good. I do not know how effective this story was as a red herring, but the fact remains that I was never questioned and was eventually released.

Thus I believe it was the training I received that permitted me to operate without detection and provided me, when picked up in the mass arrests, with the resources to weather the danger and elude any traps the secret police had set. I was glad my instructors had insisted on a cover story; had I not had one the first time I was stopped and questioned, I would have had no need for any subsequently. Their drilling me in attention to detail made it possible

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for me to meet contacts regularly and safely despite close surveillance. The rules for checking a new contact, no matter who has introduced him, saved me from an evident disaster. The value of a safety signal was brought home when I was able to warn off my contact in the prison without any telltale gesture. And being well schooled in what to do under arrest, I did not panic but was able to form a plan under which I could have maintained my innocence of everything except having amassed eight or ten bars of soap at home.

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